

WCETR 2011

## Examining mental health indices in students using Facebook in Iran

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### Abstract

*Background:* Facebook is one of the most acclaimed social Web-site in world. Existing many research about it, e. g. examining Mental Health Indices in users of Facebook. *Purpose of Study:* The present study is aimed to investigate the relationship between in mental health indexes and Facebook in Iranian students. *Methods:* 265 students from Esfahan university (162 Female & 103 Male) were chosen using convenience sampling. Farsi form of DASS-21 was translated and studied by Samani & Jokar (2006). For assessment "using Facebook" was used demography questionnaire. *Findings and Results:* The findings of the study indicated that use of Facebook has a positive and significant relation with anxiety and stress. *Conclusions:* results show that individuals that using Facebook site (compared to non user) have more anxiety and stress.

*Keywords:* Mental Health Indices, Facebook, Iranian Students;

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### 1. Introduction

Researches done on both university and school students has shown that they use Facebook more for making relationships and knowing people than using this site for educational reasons (Hew, 2011; Pempek, Yermolayeva, Calvert, 2009). A lot of researches have done on individuals using Facebook. Some of these researches examine the relationship between using Facebook and mental health variables. For example, in a research the relationship between the rate of using Facebook and psychological well-being and social capital as well was examined. The results showed that individuals with low self-esteem use Facebook more for bridging their social capital than individuals with high self-esteem (Steinfeld, Ellison, Lampe, 2008). In other research, the relationship between subjective well-being and ethnic/racial homogeneity in Facebook friendship networks in university freshman was examined. European Americans vs. non-European Americans, who had homogeneous friendship network in Facebook reported more life-satisfaction, positive affect and lower levels of felt-misunderstanding (Seder, Oishi, 2009).

Therefore, it seems that increasing the rate of making relationship with others in Facebook site leads to increased psychological well-being in users, esp. those who have low psychological well-being. Furthermore, the results of

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researches has shown that timid individuals use more time on Facebook than non-timid individuals. For in virtual world such as social site of Facebook individuals don't need to reveal their real identity and they can easily interact socially without worry and negative feeling of rejection (Orr, Sisic, Ross, Simmering, Arseneault, & Orr, 2009). Also, individuals with social anxiety prefer interactions and relationships in internet environments to face-to-face interactions and relationships (Sheldon, 2008; Ebeling-Witte, Frank, & Lester, 2007).

But new reports show that excessive use of Facebook site leads to anxiety and depression. The findings of researchers in Edinburgh Napier University show that, the more university and students use Facebook, the higher levels of anxiety and psychological worries they experience. These experts believe that Facebook increases users' virtual social contacts and therefore leads to increased anxiety and worry in users (Fars, 2011). Also, Dr Gooven Okef, paediatrics in Boston and chief author of new guideline principles of American Academy of Paediatrics says about social media that Facebook has special aspects leading to, esp. Hard social perspectives in children with already low self-esteem. Facebook pages with putting friend's advantages, updating their position, and good-looking people's pictures having nice time, in front of children's eyes may lead to worsening the feeling of some of these children who think they are not cared or given a damn. Dr Morgan Monro, a specialist in adolescent Medicine in Wisconsin University who has examined on-line social networks among college students, says using Facebook can reinforce feelings of social relating among totally adaptive children, but have completely opposite effect on those who are susceptible to depression (Hamshahri, 2011).

Therefore it can be concluded that using Facebook in moderate levels has positive effect on individuals esp. With low mental health, but excessive use of Facebook causes feelings of anxiety and depression esp. in these individuals. The goal of this research is first to examine the rate of using Facebook for by making relationships Iranian students and second to examine the relationship between the rate of using this site and mental health variables (depression, anxiety & stress). We expect that excessive use of Facebook leads to disturbed mental health.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Participants*

Participants in this research included 265 B.A. students (162 Females and 103 males) studying in Azad Universities in Isfahan in the educational year 2010-2011. Average age of these students was 21 years old and its standard deviation was 2.3. this sample was selected by available sampling.

### *2.2. Instruments*

#### *2.2.1. Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-21)*

In this research brief form of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-21) was used for assessing depression, anxiety and stress (Lavibond & Lavibond, 1995). This questioner contains 21 questions (7 questions for each factor) in likert 4 choices (0= not at all like me to 3= completely like me ).The questions assess depression, anxiety and stress in the last week. Pearson form this questionnaire is provided by Samani and Jokar (2007) and has good validity and reliability for assessing these 3 factors (Chronbakh's alpha for factors of stress, depression and anxiety is .87, .85 & .75 respectively).

#### *2.2.2. Using Facebook*

Researcher-made demographic questionnaire is yes for assessing the rate of using Facebook. First, the participants were asked if they are a member of social sites such as Facebook or not? In case they answered yes, they were asked the rate of daily and last week use of Facebook.

## **3. Result**

Results showed that 121 female students (74.6 percent) and 69 male students(66.9 percent) had experienced membership in Facebook site. Table 1 shows correlation coefficient between the rate of using Facebook site and mental health Indices generally and by sex differentiation.

Table 1: correlation coefficient results between the rate of using Facebook and mental health indices in combined sample and by sex differentiation

Variables	Group		Combined Sample
	Male	Female	
Stress	.38* (.001)**	.41 (.001)	.48 (.001)
Anxiety	.34 (.001)	.39 (.001)	.44 (.001)
Depression	.11 (.08)	.13 (.091)	.17 (.06)

\*\_Pearson correlation coefficient

\*\* Significance level

As it is seen, all correlation coefficients between the rate of using Facebook and stress and anxiety is significant but is not significant for depression.

Table 2: test results for comparing health indices in Facebook users and individuals who are not members of Facebook

Variables	M		S		t	df	P
	User	Non-User	User	Non-User			
Stress	16.3	12.1	2.1	3.1	6.71	263	.001
Anxiety	15.21	11.22	3.2	4.1	4.71	263	.001
Depression	10.2	.11	2.9	3.1	.79	263	.001

As it seen, t test results are significant for two variables of stress and anxiety but not meaningful for depression. Also independent t test results for comparing mental health indices male and female users didn't show significant results( $p > .05$ ).

#### 4. Conclusion

Findings about the first goal of this research i.e. examining the rate of using Facebook site in Iranian students, showed that 74.6 percent of females and 66.9 percent of males of the sample group are members of Facebook . Findings about the second goals i.e. examining the relationship between the rate of using Facebook and mental health variables showed that there is a positive correlation between the rate of using Facebook and anxiety and stress. But there was no significant correlation between the rate of using Facebook and depression. For explaining these findings it can be said, as mentioned in the introduction one reason is that individuals who become depressed because of using Facebook , have been susceptible to depression, e.g. they have low self-esteem . Because of the fact that the sample of this research was selected randomly from university students, it seems that this sample is less susceptible to depression than general population.

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